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FIRE AND WEAPONS

Tank Fire from Concealed Firing Positions

(Pressing problems of preparation and
utilization of tank subunits)

by

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In spite of the mass utilization of nuclear/missile weapons in a modern battle or operation, a large proportion of the tasks of the neutralization and destruction of enemy personnel and fire weapons, and the disruption of his control system and denial of maneuver, is still the duty of artillery using conventional ammunition.


One of the decisive conditions for successfully overcoming enemy defense lines during the course of an offensive is the creation of the necessary fire density for carrying out the tasks of neutralizing the enemy defense during the period of fire preparation and of fire support of an offensive.

It is not always possible to create the required fire density for neutralization using organic artillery and reinforcement weapons, even when bringing in second echelon artillery. For this reason, our service regulations envisage the possibility of calling upon tank subunits for firing from concealed firing positions.

Test exercises carried out during the last 5 to 6 years in a number of military districts (groups of forces), have confirmed the expediency of such utilization of tank subunits, as they successfully carry out part of the tasks of neutralizing enemy defense and actively reinforce the artillery.

Tank subunits being utilized for firing from concealed firing positions for the period of fire preparation of an offensive will, as a rule, conduct fire at unobserved targets, because in view of the intensive fire during that period, practically all targets become

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unobserved, with the exception of some located immediately at the enemy's forward defended edge. If one also takes into consideration that the fire preparation of an offensive in a number of cases is carried out at night or in conditions of restricted visibility, it becomes clear that tank fire from concealed firing positions at observed targets can only be a rare exception.


One should also bear in mind (article 169 of "Regulations for Firing from Tanks and Assault Guns", 1958 edition) that tank fire from concealed firing positions, as a rule, is conducted against targets integrated into sectors, or against independent targets of relatively large area. In view of the inadequate maximum rate of fire of tanks, firing against a single sector (a single target) is, as a rule, conducted simultaneously by several tank companies (usually at battalion strength) and in some cases overlapping (vnakladku) artillery subunits.

It follows from the above that the training of tank subunits in firing from concealed firing positions should at present be directed first of all at their preparation for delivering fire at unobserved targets at battalion strength.

However, the Course of Tank Firing (KST-59?) contains a firing exercise from concealed firing positions which provides for the resolving of problems of neutralization (destruction) of observed targets only and only at company strength. Such a situation cannot be considered normal. The training of tank subunits in firing from concealed firing positions should be reconstructed in such a way as to conform to the principle: "Train troops for what is required in war".

Parallel with the solution of this question we also consider it advisable to reexamine the accepted principles of organizing the control of fire of tank subunits. These principles, as is well known, are set forth in "Instructions on the Method of Utilizing Tanks and Assault Guns for Firing From Concealed Firing Positions" and in "Instructions on the Organization and the Technology of Work of Crews When Firing From Tanks and Concealed Firing Positions". A number of important points in these documents are out of date and do not meet the requirements of modern combat organization.

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For instance, these documents specify that tank company commanders control tank fire from observation points (Nablyudatelnyy Punkt - NP). Communications between the NP and the company firing positions are maintained through the radio sets of the command tanks, which are moved up directly to the NP. In cases where, in view of conditions of the terrain, it is not possible to move up the tanks directly to the NP, the company commander is issued with a portable tank radio set. Wire communications, in case of necessity, is organized by the forces and means of the artillery groups in the composition of which the tank subunits are brought in to carry out the tasks.

It is easy to see that these requirements are unacceptable.

First of all, it is practically impossible, in conditions of modern combat, to select an NP which would allow the company commander to carry out his work directly from a tank. It is still less possible to occupy such an NP secretly, together with the commander of an artillery or combined arms subunit.

Neither is it possible to supply tank subunits (down to companies inclusive) with portable radio sets or wire means for organizing communications between the tank subunits NP, and firing positions (Ognevaya Pozitsiya - OP) and for coordination communications, because neither the combined arms large units nor, still less, the artillery groups have any such reserves of communication forces and means at their disposal. Besides, in modern combat, in order to ensure fire control in such a vital period of the battle as the fire preparation of an offensive, radio communications should be duplicated by other means. For this reason, the organization of fire control of tank subunits from concealed positions, by following the principle detailed above, is fraught with great difficulties and in some cases is simply unrealistic.

At the same time one should bear in mind that tank subunits are located in concealed firing positions for several hours, but the duration of their delivery of fire during the period of fire preparation or counterpreparation is frequently limited to several minutes only.

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As we have already pointed out, in the great majority of cases tank subunits will be given unobserved targets, and, as a rule, one or a maximum of two per battalion. Consequently, the NP's of the tank battalion commanders, and even more so the NP's of company commanders, as a rule, are not able to ensure observation of the results of their fire and cannot correct it during fire delivery.

Also, during the period of fire preparation or counterpreparation, tank subunits are naturally carrying out only the planned tasks provided for beforehand in the fire table, so the control of fire of these subunits during the entire firing period will in fact only consist of transmitting several signals or commands in accordance with which tank companies conduct fire on prearranged settings in a definite order.

Thus, observation points of tank subunit commanders (especially company commanders' NP's) will in fact become points of reception of signals or commands from higher commanders for conducting fire and their transmission to the firing positions of their own subunits. They will not play any other role in support of fire control, neither will they be able to do so.

The only positive role can be played by NP's of tank battalion commanders when by personal contact with artillery battalion (division) commanders or groups they may coordinate the carrying out of such tasks as the organization of the topographical fixing of the OP's and the determining of settings for firing for effect. As for the observation points of commanders of tank companies, they will not play any part in the carrying out of these tasks. At the same time, the difficulties in organizing company observation points and controlling fire from them are most substantial.

It may be seen from what has been said that, for tank subunits, it is advisable to restrict ourselves to the organization of NP's only for battalion (batalon) commanders and to carry out all problems of fire control from these points. It is time to do away with the organizing of tank company commanders' NP's as such.

A battalion commander's NP should include the commander of one of the artillery battalions (division) or one of the batteries of the artillery group to which the battalion is attached to fulfill the task. In order to ensure camouflage and the ease of company

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control, it is best to locate the battalion headquarters in the area of their firing positions, deployed in the firing position area of one of the batteries of the artillery battalion (division), with the commander of which the tank battalion commander shares the NP. The tank of the battalion commander is also located in the headquarters area.

With such an organization, the commander controls the fire of the battalion (batalon) from the observation point through the radio set of the armored carrier or through another radio set of the battalion radio section and the tanks of company commanders located at the firing position. For duplicate communications, the wire communications of the artillery battalion (division) may be used. It is precisely in this way that the battalion commander keeps in touch with his headquarters and company commanders during the period of preparation, when radio communications are usually not allowed.

The co-location of battalion commanders', and artillery subunit commanders' NP's, as well as the location of the battalion headquarters and the firing positions in the OP area of one of the artillery batteries, ensure reliable communications and the successful solution of such important problems as the determination of company firing position coordinates, the orientation of tanks in the principal direction, and the determination of initial settings for fire for effect. All these tasks in cases of necessity may be successfully carried out by the tank battalion headquarters with the help of the senior officer at the firing position, the computing officer (vychislitel), and two or three enlisted men trained in the tying in of firing positions, from one of the artillery batteries of the artillery battalion with which the tank battalion is coordinating. This is especially important when combat is to be organized quickly and it is not possible to detail topographic subunits for tying in firing positions.

Eliminating the creation of observation posts for company commanders makes it considerably easier to organize control. Moreover, there is no necessity to move up a considerable number of personnel and combat equipment, including tanks, to the area of observation posts and to detail additional forces and means for organizing communications between the observation posts and the firing positions.

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Such a principle of organizing control does away with the unnatural separation of tank company commanders from their subunits, which considerably increases the constant readiness of the companies for carrying out tasks within their battalions and regiments.

At present, the solution of practically all the problems connected with the preparation of tank subunits for firing from concealed firing positions is carried out by the tank company commanders and the commanders and the staffs of artillery groups in whose composition the tanks are. The organization of control proposed by us makes it possible to determine clearly the duties of the commanders and staffs of tank units.

For instance, because the company commanders will always be with their companies, they will have to carry out the duties of senior officers at the firing positions and be responsible for the engineer preparation and camouflage of firing positions, the careful preparation of weapons and ammunition for firing, the observance of safety measures, the correct comprehension of the settings by the crews, the order of conducting fire and the expenditure of ammunition, for the timely readiness of the companies to conduct fire, and the precise carrying out of fire tables. Without waiting for special instructions or help, the company commander's duty is, by using his own forces and means and equipment, to determine the firing position's coordinates and to give the battalion commander ballistic corrections for the company's directing tank.

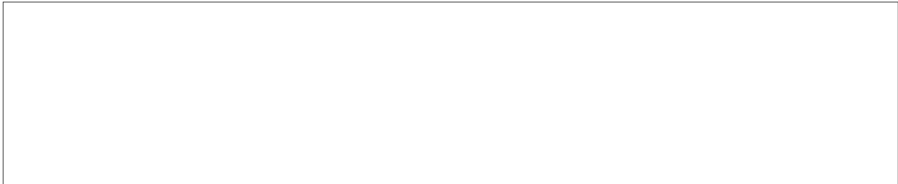
The commander and the staff of a tank battalion must establish control over the timely readiness of the companies for carrying out their tasks, organize the topographic preparation, establish the settings for firing for effect, give these settings to the companies, and determine the order of the conduct of fire and the ammunition expenditure, and control the fire of the companies during the execution of the firing table.

The duties of the commander and the staff of a tank or motorized rifle regiment whose tanks are called upon to fire from concealed positions are:

- to organize the reconnoitering of the area of the firing positions, the routes for bringing tanks to these positions and for their return to the columns of their units (large units) after completing their tasks;

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- to ensure the timely occupation of the firing positions and the NP's by the subunits, and their engineer preparation and camouflage;
 - to provide the subunits with the necessary amount of ammunition, and detail in good time ammunition carriers to help out the crews;
 - to check the preparation of weapons and ammunition for firing and the observance of safety measures at the positions;
 - to provide for timely withdrawal from the positions after completing the tasks, and the timely return and readiness of the companies and battalions to carry out their basic tasks in their own units.

These proposed ways of reshaping the training and the organization of control over tank subunits when firing from concealed firing positions, are certainly not comprehensive; they require additions and amplification. However, it is an undoubted fact that the time has come when the solution of these problems has become a necessity.

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